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THE MIDRASCH OF DEUTERONOMY.*

The entire religious literature of the Jews may be divided into two great classes, *Halacha* and *Midrasch*. The former comprises those legal precepts which were grafted upon the law of Moses, with the necessary comments thereupon, and appears preeminently in the *Talmud* and the *Tosefta* (supplementary to the *Mischna*). The latter is devoted to Interpretation of the Scripture whether expounded in the Schools of Theology or in the Synagogues before the Congregation. To be sure, the two elements are found in all Jewish writings and, e. g., the lectures in the School were perhaps predominantly *Halacha*, being given to the justification of the *Mischna*-rules by exegesis. Still a writing, so far as it was Law, was called *Halacha*; so far as it was Interpretation, was *Midrasch*. The *Midrasch* is contained in three classes of writings. 1. In the *Targums*, in so far as they pass the bounds of translations. 2. In the *Halacha* literature, whenever they give themselves to Scripture interpretation. 3. In the *Midraschim*, in the narrower sense, in which the several books of Scripture are interpreted homiletically, for the edification of the Congregation, this homiletical element being termed *Haggada*. To this third class belongs the *Midrasch* of Deuteronomy which is now under consideration.†

The book before us contains 5 pages of Introduction, followed by a literal translation of 117 pages, 3 pages citations of sources and parallels, closing with 15 pages of remarks and corrections by Rabbi Dr. J. Fuerst and by D. O. Straschun. An appendix furnishes, in 47 pages, 25 extracts from the *Pesikta Rabbathi*, a *Midrasch* of the 9th century, in age and quality closely related to our *Midrasch*, though it embraces the treatment of sections from various books of Scripture.

From the Text and Introduction we learn the following :

This *Midrasch* contains many extracts from both *Talmuds* and from the *Midrasch* of Genesis and Numbers; also from the *Haggadas* of Ecclesiastes and Solomon's Song. We can not certainly say that it was written before A. D. 1150, and it is the latest of the *Midraschim* on the Pentateuch.‡ It is divided into 27 nearly equal sections (*Paraschoth*), 11 of which are named (corresponding in content with *Paraschoth* 44-54 of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy.—B.). In each of the 27 sections, a verse, or verses are expounded in the following manner. First, a *Halacha* consisting of some question of casuistry, with the answers of the several Rabbis, quotations of Scripture and parabolical teaching upon the same, is introduced; then comes the *Midrasch* proper, a *Haggada*, or homily upon the passage, embracing Scripture parallels, opinions of Rabbis, stories, legends, parables, covering reminiscences of the past, meditations of the present and hopes for the future, a mass of matter, occasionally terse, original and beautiful, but, oftener, diffuse, fanciful, contradictory and silly. The *Halachoth* were evidently chosen as Introductions kindred in character to the *Haggada* portions which followed them. Sometimes, the similarity is apparent as in Sections 5, 15 and 19; at other times very remote, if not far-fetched as in 4 and 7.

* *Der Midrasch Debarim Rabba*, das ist, Die Haggadische Auslegung des Fuenften Buches Moses. Zum ersten Male ins Deutsche uebertragen von Lic. Dr. AUG. WUENSCHKE. Leipzig: Otto Schulze. 1882.

† For a fuller description of these terms see Weber's "System der Altsynagogalen Palaestini-schen Theologie," Leipzig, Doerffling & Franke, 1880.

‡ According to Weber, this *Midrasch* dates from the 9th century and is older than that of Exodus, Numbers and Ecclesiastes.

In expounding the Scripture there were very wide differences of statement, due to play upon words, and other strained attempts to gather a meaning entirely new. In this effort, words are "cleft in twain," letters transposed and vowels altered, at pleasure.

The substance of a single section will be sufficient to set forth the method employed; pp. 37, sqq.:—

Deut. vi., 4. *Hear O Israel! The Eternal our God, the Eternal is one.*

Halacha. Has an Israelite done his duty who reads the pattern (Schema) without strict attention to the letters (sounds, pronunciation, &c.)? The wise-men have taught thus: R. Jose says: "Yes, he has done his duty." R. Jehuda, on the contrary says: "No, he has not done his duty." What are we to understand by the careful reading of the letters? The Rabbis have taught; e. g., in **בכל לבבכם**, there must be a separation between the two letters **ל**, since the first word ends with the same letter with which the second begins. R. Jehuda says: "He who reads the pattern (Schema), walking, must standing, take upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven." What is the Kingdom of Heaven? "The Eternal, our God, the Eternal is one." How long since the Israelites began to read the Schema? R. Pinchas bar Chama says: "Since the giving of the law." How so? Thou findest that God began with these words on Sinai, "Hear O Israel! I am the Eternal, thy God," and all the Israelites chimed in with the words: "The Eternal, our God, the Eternal is one," and Moses added "Blessed be the name of the glory of His Kingdom for ever and ever." According to the Rabbis, God spoke to the Israelites: "My children, all that I have created have I created *in pairs*. Heaven and earth are a pair, sun and moon are a pair, Adam and Eve are a pair, this world and that world are a pair, My honor however is one and alone in the world." How do you prove that? From the words "Hear O Israel! &c."

Or: "Hear O Israel! &c.," in connection with Ps. LXXIII., 25: "Whom have I in Heaven? &c." According to Rab there are two firmaments, the Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens; according to R. Eleasar, however, there are seven, **שמים** the heaven, **שמי שמים** the heaven of heavens, **רקיע** the expanse, **מעין שחקים** clouds dwelling, **זבול** dwelling and **ערפל** cloudiness, and God opened them all to the Israelites to prove to them that "There is no other God than He." The Congregation of Israel spoke before God: "Lord of the world! whom have I in the heavens, besides thy honor. As I have only thee, so desire I no other upon the earth. As I join with thee no other God in the heaven, so on earth, but I go daily into the houses of assembly and testify that besides thee there is no God and I say: 'Hear O Israel! the Eternal, our God, the Eternal is one.'" "Or: "Hear O Israel! &c.," in connection with Prov. XXIV., 21, "Fear the Eternal, my son, and the king and meddle not with innovators." What means **ומלך**? Have I not caused Abraham who feared me, to rule in the world, as it says in Gen. XIV.: "In the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's valley?" And Joseph, as it says in Gen. XLII., 6, "Joseph was governor over the land?" Or: "Fear the Eternal, my son; **ולך**" that is;—"and rule over thy passion." R. Simeon ben Eleasar went once to a city in the South, came to a Synagogue and asked the Scribe: "By thy life! is there wine for sale?" "To be sure, Rabbi, in this city are Samaritans, they do not deal in pure wine, however, as my ancestors did." The other said: "If thou hast any wine left, I will take it." The

Scribe answered: If thou art master of thyself, do not taste it." R. Simeon replied: "I am, and have been master of myself." That is the sense of **ומלך**, namely **ומלך**.

Or: "Fear the Eternal, my son **ומלך**. What means **ומלך**? **ואל למולך**, as it says in Lev. xviii., 21: "and thy seed shalt thou not devote to Moloch."

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Or: "Hear O Israel!" The Rabbis say: "When Moses mounted the heights of heaven, he heard the angel say to God—'Praise the name of His glorious Kingdom for ever.' This expression he brought back to the Israelites." Why do the Israelites not repeat it publicly? "For the same reason," said R. Asi, "that a man who has pilfered an ornament from the King's palace and given it to his wife says to the latter, 'Do not ornament yourself with it publicly, but only within the house.' But on the day of the Atonement, when the Israelites appear as innocent as the angels, then they say aloud 'Blessed be the name of his glorious Kingdom for ever.'"

A brief Haggada upon v. 5 closes this section.

Historically the Midrasch is valuable, otherwise it is nearly worthless.

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